licenses with the obligations to deploy one lakh village phones in three years;

(b) if so, whether these, private companies have since fulfilled this obligation; if so, the details thereof alongwith the number of VPTs provided, so far, by these companies; and

(c) if answer to part (b) be in negative, the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) As against the commitment to provide 97806 Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in first three years of their licence, the private basic telephone service licensees have reported to have provided 4252 VPTs by 31 st October, 2002. The Government has permitted them to meet their unfulfilled commitments by the end of December, 2002 against submission of Performance Bank Guarantees and Deed of Guarantees towards such unfulfilled obligations.

Laying of submarine cable link between Visakhapatnam and Kuala Lumpur

228. SHRI K. KALAVENKAT RAO: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a proposal to lay submarine cable link from Visakhapatnam to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia has been finalised;

(b) what benefits would accrue to the country from this project; and

(c) by when this cable link is likely to be functional?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) A proposal to set up a submarine cable landing station at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh was submitted in April, 2001 by M/s. Astro Network India Private Limited proposing Vishakhapatnam and Penang (Malaysia) as terminal stations.

The Company so far has not shown any interest in going ahead with the proposal as they are yet to respond to certain clarifications requested on the proposal.

Setting up of telephone exchanges in Assam

229. SHRI DWIJENDRA NATH SHARMAH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state;

(a) whether Government propose to set up telephone exchanges in all the Blocks/Districts of Assam;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the effective measures being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) All the 23 Revenue District Head Quarters are already having telephone exchanges in Assam. Out of 219 Block Head Quarters, 170 Block Head Quarters are having telephone exchanges, Due to non-availability of minimum registered demand, telephone exchanges could not be opened in the balance 49 Block Head Quarters (BHQs). Exchanges will be opened in these BHQs as and when the minimum registered demand is received.

Setting up of a National Internet Exchange

† 230. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state;

(a) whether the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has submitted a suggestion to Government to set up a National Internet Exchange for development of internet keeping in view of slow expansion of internet in the country;

(b) if so, the other suggestions given by the authority to boost development of internet;

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.